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AUTHOR Myers, Mark D.
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ABSTRACT

Social theory defines "ritualism" as the communal act of accepting the legitimate means to achieve while rejecting the goals. The innovative-school community accepts the goals; however, the legitimate means are rejected. Ninety-three teachers were surveyed in a high-performing high school and a low-performing high school to determine the relationship between goals and means to achieve the goals. Responses were examined to determine which schools practice ritualism or innovation according to anomic social theory. School performance was designated based on 10th-grade state test scores and SAT averages. The data were tested with a one-way ANOVA to examine any variance in means between responses of teachers in the high-performing school and in the low-performing school. No significant difference was found with regard to the teachers in the two schools regarding knowledge of or agreement with school goals. Differences in means were found in the beliefs by teachers that students in the high-performing school and students in the low-performing school could achieve the goals. Given the stark contrast between the two schools regarding socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and achievement, it may be beneficial to continue to examine these questions in greater depth. (Contains 16 references.) (Author/WFA)

The Functional Mission of the Innovative and Ritualistic Schools

Mark D Myers

Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne

School of Education

Fort Wayne, Indiana

myersm@ipfw.edu

(260) 481 6452 (o)

(260) 338 0240 (h)

(260) 481 5408 facsimile

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ABSTRACT

Social theory defines ritualism as the communal act of accepting the legitimate means to achieve while rejecting the goals. The innovative school community accepts the goals; however, the legitimate means are rejected. Ninety-three teachers were surveyed in a high performing high school and a low performing high school. Responses were examined to determine which schools practice ritualism or innovation according to anomie social theory. School performance was designated based on tenth grade state test scores and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) averages. The data were tested with a one-way ANOVA to examine any variance in means between responses of teachers in the high performing school and low performing school. No significant difference was found with regard to the teachers in the two schools regarding knowledge of school goals or agreement with school goals. Differences in means were found in the beliefs by teachers that students within the high performing school and low performing school could achieve the goals.

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The Functional Mission of the Innovative and Ritualistic Schools

Little has been written about the effects that drive the functional mission of the school. McGreal (1999) identifies the functional curriculum as the representation of the events that occur as the result of the teacher's decisions in the classroom each day. The investigators have expanded this concept to define the school's functional mission as the sum of all of the efforts that are planned, implemented, and examined by the school. Conceptually, our research is based on anomic social theory or *anomie*. Theoretically, this concept demonstrates that schools can become highly ritualistic (Durkheim, 1933; Merton, 1968; Orru, 1987; Turner, 1991; Schweitzer, 1991) as a result of actions by those in the community who accept the means to achieve school goals, yet reject the goals as unattainable. Innovative school communities adopt the goals while rejecting the legitimate means to achieve (Durkheim, 1933; Merton, 1968). A Stanford staff development study (Bush, 1984) showed that over seventy percent of American schools are "maintenance oriented" or ritualistic. Conditions within a school community exist to contribute to ritualism or innovation when norms are unclear or nonexistent (Komache, 1995; Turner 1991; Merton, 1968). The argument could be made that teachers who doubt that goals can be achieved regardless of means used contribute to ritualism as defined by Merton (1968); however, when the school community is staffed with a majority of incremental theorists—teachers, department chairs, and building leaders—who are competent in the subject area and cognizant of current practice, the school becomes highly catalytic. A study of three hundred fifteen high school English students and five teachers in Southeastern Louisiana showed there was a statistically significant

difference ($p < .05$) between teacher and student perceptions of commitment to persistence and the implementation of self-regulatory strategies to achieve academic goals. The significance was evident when teacher-student congruence was observed for the construct of incremental beliefs (Nichols, 1998; Nichols, and Steffy, 1999). Some teachers view intelligence as theoretically incremental; others see the ability to develop cognitive skills as an entity (Dweck, 1986; Dweck and Legett, 1988).

Research Questions

The following questions provide the basis for the research contained within this study.

1. Do teachers practice innovation or ritualism in a low performing school?
2. Do teachers practice innovation or ritualism in a high performing school?
3. Do teachers in a low performing school view goals the same as teachers in a high performing school?
4. Do teachers in a low performing school view the means used to achieve differently when compared to teachers in a high performing school?

Method

This project looked at the relationship between goals and means to achieve goals in a high performing high school and a low performing high school. The *Purdue University Committee on the Use of Human Subjects* approved the research February 14, 2002. Data in the two schools were gathered during March of 2002.

A high performing school is defined as a high school with scores on state tests

that exceed the state standards and SAT scores that exceed the state average. A low performing school was identified as a school with state test scores that fall below the state average and SAT scores that are below the state average.

High Performing School Demographics

Fifty-six of the seventy-six teachers (77 percent) responded to surveys administered by the high school principal of a rural school located inside a MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area) in Indiana. The school is ninety-five percent White, one percent Black, and two percent Hispanic. State data (Indiana Department of Education, 2002) show that fewer than five percent of the student population participates in free or reduced school lunch. During 2000-2001, the SAT composite for college-bound seniors was 1054; the state average for that same period was 1000. In 2000-2001 eighty-four percent of the grade ten students passed the state proficiency test; the state average for public schools was sixty-seven percent (Indiana Department of Education, 2002). This high performing school was cited by the department of education for academic excellence and designated as a "Four Star School." Four Star Schools are those schools who were in the top 25% of all Indiana Public Schools in four categories. (Percent Passing both English/LA and Math, ISTEP Math Proficiency, ISTEP Language Proficiency, and Attendance Rate. The total enrollment for the high performing school was one thousand three hundred seventy six students for 2001 (Indiana Department of Education, 2002).

Low Performing School Demographics

Thirty-seven of the thirty-nine teachers (95 percent) responded to surveys administered by the high school principal of a rural school located inside a MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area) in Indiana. During the 2001 school year, the school was nineteen percent White, seventy-six percent Black, and two percent Hispanic. State data (Indiana Department of Education, 2002) show forty-eight percent of the student population participates in free or reduced school lunch. During 2000-2001, the SAT composite for college-bound seniors was 832; the state average for that same period was 1000. In 2000-2001, twenty-nine percent of the grade ten students passed the state proficiency test; the state average for public schools was sixty-seven percent. The total student enrollment for 2001 was 576. (Indiana Department of Education, 2002).

Instrument

The teacher survey instrument contained thirty-one, Likert-type questions (scaled 1-5) that measured teacher responses related to goals and means to achieve school goals. The questions pertaining to the teacher's acceptance of goals included teacher's agreement with school goals (7 items), the teacher's belief that the students can achieve the goals (8 items), and the teacher's knowledge of the school goals (4 items). Furthermore, the instrument contained twelve questions that looked the teacher's acceptance or rejection of the legitimate means to achieve the school goals.

These Likert-scaled (scaled 1-5) items measured the teacher's belief that the personnel in the school represent a legitimate means to achieve goals (2 items), acceptance of the facilities as a means to achieve goals (4 items), and the teacher's acceptance of materials and supplies as a means to achieve goals (6 items). The scales included a response for the numeral "5 Don't Know." The values of the variables for the response of 5 were recalculated as 2.5 for the purposes of calculating mean scores. The teacher instrument requested qualitative data and solicited responses to open-ended questions and comments. A follow-up interview was conducted with each principal to share the results of the data examined.

Results

Alpha reliabilities for the teacher instrument for the subcategories of the teacher's agreement with goals, the teacher's view of the probability that students would achieve goals, and the teacher's knowledge of goals were $r = .72, .80, \text{ and } .74$ respectively. Alpha reliabilities for the teacher's beliefs about the means to achieve in relation to school personnel, facilities, and materials & supplies were $r = .60, .52, \text{ and } .45$ respectively.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedures were used to examine mean score differences between the teacher responses from the high performing school and the teacher responses from the low performing school. ANOVA results indicated that overall, when the mean scores of the teacher responses of the high performing school and the low performing school were compared, teacher beliefs about the student's probability

to achieve goals $F(1,87) = 1.158, p < .008$ were significantly lower for the low performing school. The responses for acceptance of the facilities as a means to achieve the goals showed teachers in the higher performing school were significant lower than the low performing school $F(1,87) = 10.186, p < .002$. No significant differences were observed between the two schools with agreement of goals, knowledge of goals, personnel as a means to achieve goals, or the use of equipment and materials used as a means to achieve school goals

This study shows a significant difference in the acceptance of school goals when we compare the means of teacher responses from a high performing school and mean scores from teachers responding from a low performing school. The study further reveals that in this case, there is a difference in the teacher's acceptance of the legitimate means to achieve school goals in view of the rejection of the facilities as an adequate means to achieve school goals by teachers in the high performing school. The investigators found no difference between the responses of the teachers in the high performing and low performing schools when comparing teacher's agreement with school goals, knowledge of goals, personnel as a means to achieve the goals, or equipment & materials used as a means to achieve goals.

Implications for Principals

State reform initiatives may have contributed toward standardizing goals for schools. The media and state departments of education have made significant efforts to communicate goals, standards and objectives contained within the reforms. Haynes

(1996) defines school climate as "the quality and frequency of interactions between staff members in the school and students, among the students, among the staff members themselves, and between staff at the school and parents and the community." If the discourse within those critical interactions revolves around the issues linked to achievement of school goals, the climate might perpetuate or retard ritualistic or innovative practice. The responsibility to ensure that the staff knows school goals rests with the principal; however, simple knowledge of goals may not be enough to move the school climate toward innovative behaviors. If the teachers agree with the goals and at the same time have little or no confidence in student achievement, the school may suffer from long-term effects of ritualism. The issues become more complex due to the nature of the goals since they are generally adopted at the state or national level; local schools must embrace goals that often appear to come from afar. The consequence as a result of a lack of evidence that goals are achievable and the nature of development by the state or national departments of education may contribute the ritualistic practices. If the principal and administrative staff can create an honest dialogue during the interactions within the school community about why students fail to reach goals, innovation may evolve as defined by sociological theorists. Conversely, the principal of the high performing school may see widespread complacency within the school when teacher's expectations are consistently affirmed by state test scores. The principal's ability to monitor these climate interactions may be critical. Peterson and Deal (1998) note that the principal frames the culture with words, nonverbal signals, daily actions, and commitment to advancing the school agenda. At the very least, the principal should be

aware of factors that influence teacher's *knowledge of goals, agreement with goals, and belief* that when students enter the schoolhouse, they can achieve each day.

Summary

Given the theoretical definitions provided by social science literature (Durkheim, 1933; Merton, 1968; Orru, 1987; Schweitzer, 1991), teachers of the high performing school rejected the legitimate means to achieve yet accepted the goals by virtue that the school meets the criteria as a high performing school. Therefore, the high performing school has demonstrated innovation in at least one domain. The low performing school is ritualistic by virtue that teachers in this study accepted fully all of the legitimate means tested to achieve the goals—personnel, facilities, equipment, and materials—while believing the goals could not possibly be achieved. The teachers of the low performing school rejected the view that students could achieve school goals. Teachers in the low performing school agreed with school goals as strongly as the teachers in the high performing school. Teachers of the two schools were equally as knowledgeable about the goals.

In regard to the research questions, based on this single study of two high schools we found the following:

1. There is evidence to suggest that teachers in this low performing school function in a ritualistic environment;
2. The examination of these data show teachers in the high performing school are innovative to some degree;

3. The teachers of the high performing school fully accepted the school goals when compared to the teachers of the low performing school;
4. The teachers in the high performing school rejected in part, the means to achieve goals when compared to the teachers in the low performing school;
5. The teachers in the low performing school fully accepted the means to achieve the goals when compared to the teachers of the high performing school.

Additional questions can be framed regarding the possibility of a serious "crisis of confidence" among teachers in low performing high schools. Further research might shed light as to why teachers in the low performing school reject the premise that students can achieve goals while being keenly aware (having knowledge) of the goals. The picture becomes perhaps a bit more curious when we see evidence that teachers in a low performing school show agreement with the goals as strongly as teachers in a high performing school. A clear and concise knowledge of school goals by the faculty may suggest the school leaders are communicating effectively and well with teachers. In this study, the teachers in the low performing school agree with the school goals at a level no differently than those teaching in an award-winning, high performing school. Agreement with the school goals among teachers in the low performing school may demonstrate a strong and dedicated commitment by the faculty to the school, students they serve, and the administration. Given the stark contrasts between these two schools regarding socio-

economic status, ethnicity, and achievement based on state test scores and SAT scores, it may be beneficial to continue to examine these questions in greater depth. The value of applying social science theory to schools may become evident as we look critically at the effects of ritualism and innovation and the influence teacher practices have on student achievement in high performing and low performing American high schools.

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